Who is the visually handicapped child?

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Who is the Visually Handicapped Child?

The visually handicapped child or youth is usually easily recognized by the very thick lensed glasses he wears, or by his use of a white cane or sighted human guide. Not all youngsters with a severe visual impairment draw immediate attention to their visual problem; some of them can read regular print, if it is enlarged, travel easily by themselves, and get along well with their peers. However, these children may still need special services to learn to function actively in society.

For educational purposes, children with severely impaired vision do not fit neatly into separate categories of "blind" or "partially seeing." For this reason, educators now use the term "visually handicapped" for all children whose visual impairment, even after correction, results in the need for special educational services.

For many years, the educational system in the United States harbored the idea that children with visual problems had to be segregated for educational purposes. They were placed in residential schools for the blind or in special classes for partially seeing children in regular schools.

The use of the broader term "visually handicapped" is particularly appropriate for educational settings since it allows schools to develop programs for students who need additional assistance. With this definition schools are no longer bound to the legal definition of blindness—20/200. This medical term means that a "legally blind person" sees at 20 feet what a sighted person sees at 200 feet. Also, the definition of blindness used for legal purposes is unsatisfactory as it is of limited usefulness to educators either as a definition or as a criterion for inclusion of children in programs of special education. The great majority of school programs for "blind" children, for example, also embrace those with educationally useful residual vision.

It is now standard professional practice in special education to place and teach visually handicapped children on the basis of an educationally oriented appraisal of the effects of the vision impairment. This practice stems from an increased awareness that factors such as motivation, prior learning, achievement, intelligence, and experience with special media for teaching can be far more relevant than measurements of visual acuity.

Number of Visually Handicapped Children and Youth

It is a myth that the number of visually handicapped children is decreasing. If one considers the population explosion, medical conditions such as rubella, and accidents, it becomes apparent that the incidence of visual loss in youth is still critical. According to a recent publication of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, Inc. there are approximately 136,000 school age children and youth who are visually handicapped in this country. This estimate is based upon visual acuity.

Educational Objectives for Visually Handicapped Children

The general aims and objectives of education are applicable for all children, including the visually handicapped. Placement in a school setting will depend upon the educational, medical, emotional, and social needs of each visually handicapped student. An adequate program of evaluation is particularly important.

The special objectives of education for visually handicapped children include:

Efficient Use of Vision. Training in the use of residual vision and in good eye health practices.

Educational Adjustment. Participation in all phases of the school program; testing and counseling to obtain true educational level; stressing of highest potential; and helping to prevent traumatic failures.

Social Adjustment. Promotion of good mental health through a realistic view of visual limitations; the establishment of sound values of self-respect and self-worth; participation in school activities; and the setting of personal achievement goals.

Vocational Guidance. The provision of guidance based on aptitude tests; the presentation of applicable vocational areas for observation and consideration; and referral to appropriate rehabilitation services.

Counseling on Vision. Interpretation of educational implications to parents, students, school personnel, and other professional groups in the community.

Types of Educational Programs for the Visually Handicapped Student

Historically, organizational patterns have included:

(1) state and private residential schools. These as a general rule provide total care as well as education during the school year and they also have facilities for medical, social, recreational, and pre-vocational guidance and training;

(2) three types of public school programs are common: (a) special classes—instruction by specially qualified teachers throughout the school day in separate units; (b) resource room—children are registered with regular teachers who assume the major responsibility for their education and utilize the provisions of the resource room and teacher as the need arises; and (c) itinerant programs—children are enrolled in regular schools near their homes and are provided with special instruction in keeping with their needs by teachers who travel among the schools in one or more districts or counties. The public school system will also usually have facilities for medical, social, recreational, and pre-vocational guidance and training.

Although all of these approaches have been used in public school systems, singly or in various combinations, the principal structures now in use are the resource room and the itinerant teacher program. The residential school structure remains much the same as in the past. Education has undergone many changes, but the residential school and public school programs are both still vital to meet the educational requirements of the visually handicapped child and adolescent.

Educational Training for the Teacher of the Visually Handicapped

General Preparation

Teachers in specialized fields should have a basic planned program of preparation in education in the United States; the knowledge and ability to apply the principles of human growth, development, and learning; understanding of the purpose, organization, and operation of educational programs; and supervised practice teaching experience in a regular educational setting.

Specific Preparation

Students should also enroll in courses that contain information about the characteristics, prevalence, educational procedures, research, and relevant resources for all major categories of handicapped-children; types and degrees of visual impairments with specific reference to educational implications of eye conditions; knowledge of identification and placement of visually handicapped children; educational procedures; the teaching of communication skills (reading and writing by means of braille and/or print, typing and listening skills development); a practice teaching experience with visually handicapped children; and ancillary courses in orientation and mobility (methods of travel for visually handicapped people), daily living skills, and educational appraisal and remedial techniques. Another important aspect of training is a course on local, state, and national resources for the education and assistance of children who are visually handicapped.

Training Institutions

The number of colleges and universities providing training for individuals to become teachers of the visually handicapped has increased considerably in recent years. This expansion has come about largely through grants offered by the United States Office of Education.

Each of the colleges and universities listed below provides a comprehensive program leading to a bachelor's degree in the area of the visually handicapped. Institutions offering only summer courses or courses to meet teacher certification requirements are not listed.

Professional Preparation Programs for Teachers of the Visually Handicapped

Arizona

College of Education
Department of Special Education
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

California

Department of Special Education
California State College at Los Angeles
5151 State College Drive
Los Angeles, California 90032

Department of Special Education
San Francisco State College
1600 Holloway
San Francisco, California 94132

Colorado

Department of Special Education
Colorado State College
Greely, Colorado 80631

Florida

College of Education
Department of Habilitative Sciences
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida 32306

Illinois

Department of Special Education
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

Department of Special Education
Illinois State University
Fairchild Hall
Normal, Illinois 61761

Massachusetts

Department of Special
Education and Rehabilitation
Boston College
96 College Road
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167

Michigan

School of Education
Department of Special Education
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

Department of Special Education
Wayne State University
5425 Second Street
Detroit, Michigan 48202

Department of Elementary
and Special Education
Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Department of Special Education
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Minnesota

Department of Special Education
101 Pattee Hall
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

New Jersey

Department of Special Education
Jersey City State College
Jersey City, New Jersey 07305

New York

Dominican College of Blauvelt
Blauvelt, New York 10915

Department of Special Education
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York, New York 10027

Professional Preparation Programs for Teachers of the Visually Handicapped (continued)

New York

Hunter College of the City
University of New York
695 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Syracuse University
805 South Crouse Avenue
Syracuse, New York 13210

Ohio

College of Education
Department of Education
Ohio State University
1945 North High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Oregon

School of Education
Department of Special Education
Portland State College
Post Office Box 751
Portland, Oregon

Pennsylvania

Department of Special Education
Kutztown State College
Kutztown, Pennsylvania 19530

Department of Special Education
and Rehabilitation, School of Education
University of Pittsburgh
160 North Craig Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213

Tennessee

George Peabody College for Teachers
Box 326
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Texas

Department of Special Education
Sutton Hall 205
University of Texas
Austin, Texas 78712

Utah

Department of Special Education
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84601

Virginia

Department of Special Education
Peabody Hall
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903

Department of Special Education
Old Dominion College
Hampton Boulevard & 49th Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Special Preparation Programs

The following universities provide training programs which are so specialized as to warrant listing in a separate category:

Teacher Preparation for Teachers of Deaf/Blind Children

California

Special Education Department
San Francisco State College
1600 Holloway
San Francisco, California 94132

Massachusetts

Department of Special
Education and Rehabilitation
Boston College
700 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167

Michigan

Department of Elementary
and Special Education
Erickson Hall - Room 213
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Oregon

School of Education
Portland State College
Post Office Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207

Tennessee

Department of Special Education
George Peabody College for Teachers
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Orientation and Mobility Specialists

California

Department of Special Education
California State College at Los Angeles
5151 State College Drive
Los Angeles, California 90032

Department of Special Education
San Francisco State College
1600 Holloway
San Francisco, California 94132

Florida

Department of Habilitative Sciences
College of Education
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida 32306

Massachusetts

Department of Special
Education and Rehabilitation
Boston College
700 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167

Michigan

Training Center for
Orientation and Mobility
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49001

Rehabilitation Teachers

Training Center for Orientation and Mobility
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49001

Doctoral Level Research Personnel

University of Southern California
University Park
Los Angeles, California

Program Services

Each state or community has differing administrative policies relative to responsibilities of personnel in providing educational programs for visually handicapped children. Who is to provide services and what is the policy for the provision of such services are dependent upon the size of the community, the training of the personnel, availability of community resources, and state educational agency reimbursement procedures. Therefore, the following chart is presented only as a suggestion or guide to assist in determining responsibility for such programs.

Procedure Involved

The functions checked in this table represent both individual and group responsibilities.

	Administrator	Director of Special Education	Special Teacher	Regular Classroom Teacher	Health Service (Nurse)	Eye Specialist	Psychologist	Social Worker	Rehabilitation Counselor	Guidance Counselor	Volunteers	Clerical Staff
1. Identifying child through vision screening program	●		●		●	●					●	
2. Determining need for special service	●	●	●	●			●			●		
3. Interpreting to school personnel	●	●	●									
4. Interpreting to parents need for special services			●			●	●	●		●		
5. Planning academic program		●	●	●			●			●		
6. Determining and recommending purchase of appropriate special materials			●	●								
7. Ordering special materials	●	●										●
8. Arranging transportation when needed	●	●									●	●
9. Obtaining annual eye report			●		●							
10. Contacting eye specialist			●		●							
11. Evaluating:												
Pupil's continuing need for program		●	●	●			●		●	●		
Program organization	●	●										
12. Interpreting program to community	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
13. Encouraging extracurricular activities			●	●			●	●		●		
14. Contacting rehabilitation service		●	●						●	●		
15. Guiding volunteers (production of materials)		●	●	●								●

American Foundation for the Blind
15 West 16th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

9-69-25